Radical Grace and the Economy

Module V. Denial of the Individual

This is *Section V* of the broader workbook called
Radical Grace and the Economy

This is a PDF file. It can be downloaded in the usual manner, using File|Save or ⇧|Save.

Here's the first of 5 issues we'll discuss in this section:

Individual without Community

The emptiness of "economic man".

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Issues

- *Individuals in Community*
  - ✓ Normally, we're deeply imbedded in family — from kin to community to creatures to ecology to spirit. At the same time we're individuals, each expressing that deep interconnectedness in our own unique way. Such is the spark and balance of life.
- *Denying our Connectedness*
  - ✓ By attempting to take that interconnectedness out of life — proclaiming a radical individualism — economic ideology is divorcing us from the communities that nourish our uniqueness. All that's left is an empty shell called "economic man" who seeks nothing but personal gain with no interest in anything or anyone else.

Discussion Questions

1. **British PM Margaret Thatcher once said**, "There is no such thing as society, only individuals". How would you reply?
2. **Has there ever been a society** of radical individuals like economists imagine? Is it possible to have such a society?

Finding the True Self

The meaning of self.

Issues

- *False Self, True Self*
  - ✓ Empty individuality without substance detracts from true individuality — contributing one's uniqueness to something greater than oneself.
- *Emptiness is Unsatisfying*
  - ✓ Individuals may be distracted by constant gratification, but they're not fully comfortable with emptiness.
- *Individuals Seek Meaning in the Divine*
  - ✓ People of the spirit seek meaning in life through forms of individual expression that connect them with their community and with the divine. They reject any idea that self-gratification can give meaning to life.

Discussion Questions

1. **Is it a contradiction** that radical individualism robs us of our true individuality?
2. **Are people really discontented** with the empty life when it offers constant gratification?
3. **What's the distinction** — from scholars like Thomas Merton and Richard Rohr — between the false self and the true self? If you haven't read them, take a guess. How much do you live your true self?

Joy of the Greater Self

The nature of the true self.

Issues

- *Self-Gratification Detracts*
  - ✓ Franciscans feel that individual self-gratification detracts from their devotion to serving God's children, and is indeed a flight from God.
- *Self-Denial Rules*
  - ✓ They follow a Rule of Life calls that calls for self-denial — because it clears away distractions that get in the way of living in God's presence.
- *Service is Their Self-Expression*
  - ✓ They call for dedication to serving the community and beyond, especially the marginalized and broken. This is seen as the only true self-expression.

Discussion Questions

1. **Why is self-gratification** a flight from God?
2. **In what sense does self-expression** lie in self-denial? What do you gain when you lose your self-indulgent self?
3. **Is service to others sacrificing yourself**, or is it finding yourself? Why?

Creatures of Community

How indigenous people view the self.

Issues

- *Seeking Balance*
  - ✓ Indigenous people seek a balance between healthy community and individual aspirations — viewing behaviour that's too self-serving as a disorder — and viewing individuals who find creative and unique ways to serve the community as noble.
- *Valuing Generosity*
  - ✓ Generosity is a high virtue and a high aspiration, and it's not unusual to share one's belongings with others in the community who need them more. They have many ways of blending individual generosity with community solidarity. Balance is the key.

Discussion Questions

1. **If self-serving behaviour is acceptable** in one branch of society, and not present in another, how can we reconcile those opposing values?
2. **How is the well-being of your community** the highest expression of your individual self?

Confronting the Ideology

How a long-ingrained individualism may be undermined.

Issues

- *Debunking the Canon*
  - ✓ A narrowly-conceived individualism has been drummed into many generations of western minds. It has convinced many that fulfillment can be found by ignoring the community and defying its spirit. But we're immersed in community, nourished by community. The only true individuality is to express — each in one's own unique way — the gifts that kin, community, creatures, nature and spirit have given us.
- *Taking the Long View*
  - ✓ An indigenous approach is to work for change seven generations down the road. Plant seeds for a different way of living in the future as unique members of God's creation. That calls for an agenda that's subversive and disruptive and patient, yet requires a community to bring it about.
- *And Showing the Way*
  - ✓ It also calls on us to show the way — to live the life that brings together each of our unique contributions to the well-being of creation and community — and show how that is a life of love and reconciliation and service.

Discussion Questions

1. **How can we be unique individuals** and creatures of community at the same time?
2. **Is a life of love and reconciliation and service** too hard a sell in such a self-indulgent society?
3. **How do you choose to be subversive?** How counter-cultural are you? How much have you been able to break away from the dominant narrative?

This is Module V. Denial of the Individual

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